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Family of

William Lloyd Garrison

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AN ADDRESS

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

ON THE

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PROPRIETY OF ABSTAINING FROM THE USE

OF THE PRODUCE OF

SLAVE LABOUR.

Family of
— ❁ ❁ ❁ —
William Lloyd Garrison

July 8, 1899.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1838.

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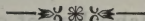
WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

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DEAR FRIENDS:—It is under a feeling of love that we address you upon a subject of great importance, embracing as it does some of the most valuable and interesting testimonies which our Society has been called upon to bear, and to which exercised Friends have been so long engaged in calling the attention of the people. Under this feeling, we ask your calm and deliberate attention to a few suggestions on the propriety of Friends' abstaining from the use of the produce of slave labor.

While this subject has comparatively made but little progress, it is by no means new, for we find that some concerned Friends, many years ago, (even before the practice of slaveholding was done away with in the Society,) felt conscientiously scrupulous about using goods produced by unrequited labor.

Among the earliest of these, was found that distinguished minister, *John Woolman*, who has left ample testimony of his great concern upon this subject, and the earnest desire which he felt to awaken the minds of the people to its importance.

In order to come to a correct conclusion, let us refer to the establishment of slavery in this country; in doing so, we shall find that the slaves were originally *stolen* from Africa, forcibly wrested from the bosom of their homes, families, and friends,—that the dearest ties of nature were rudely torn asunder, to gratify the avaricious and wicked cupidity of those engaged in this horrible traffic.

Consequently, the first slaveholders had no right to those whom they held; and as the present slaves of the South have either been obtained in the same manner themselves, or are the descendants of such as have been, it is perfectly clear that slaveholders now have no better right to those whom they hold as their property.

For we are unable to see how a person could rightfully transfer what did not justly belong to him, to his posterity; or how anything stolen can be changed in its nature by passing through a number of hands.

Then, independent of the consideration that the labor by which the commodities of the South are produced is that of men, we think the use of the produce of the labor of any animal, obtained in so unjust a manner, would be abandoned, if our professions of honesty were strictly adhered to.

But in looking at the subject in a more serious light, additional objections suggest themselves to the practice of using slave produce.

In reflecting upon the fact, that the slaves are immortal beings; like ourselves, created by the Almighty hand, designed for the same noble purposes, and heirs of a never-ending eternity; and when we remember that they are placed upon the auction stand to be sold to the highest bidder, subjected to cruel treatment and mental degradation, it becomes us to consider well our connexion with the evil,—to enter into an individual and scrutinizing *investigation* of our conduct, to see whether we are giving any support to a system so replete with misery and injustice.

We think such an investigation will prove to many of us that we are verily guilty concerning our brother, while we partake of the produce of his unrequited labor. For, let us inquire, why

does the slaveholder keep his subjects in their present condition? The answer is obvious. To raise sugar, coffee, cotton, tobacco, and other articles, to produce goods to supply the demand created by the consumers. It must be admitted that those who partake of these articles are not clean-handed, for so long as we continue to consume slave produce, we are aiding and abetting the system in affording the very means by which it is supported.

Again. The discipline of the Society of Friends explicitly prohibits the use or trade in prize goods, while our members are in the daily practice of using, buying, and selling slave produce. We are unable to see the great distinction which allows the use of the one, and prohibits that of the other. In the one case, the merchant freights his vessel with the commodities of one country intended for the market of another; in the course of the voyage she is met by an enemy of the government to which the owner belongs, and is robbed of her cargo; this is brought to our market, and we unhesitatingly refuse to partake in any way of goods obtained through so impure a channel. While, on the other hand, the planter of the South sends his vessel laden with the produce of the unrequited labor of the slave—

the hard earnings of our fellow beings—we receive, buy, and sell the cargo with impunity.

Do we consider the slave less deserving of pity because he is not only deprived of all his possessions, but also of his own liberty? or does the circumstance of the goods having been obtained on land, render them less exceptionable? The ground that slave produce is prize goods, is not a new one. Elias Hicks, in a pamphlet published more than fifteen years since, says, in answer to a query:

“The slaves being taken by violence, either directly or indirectly, contrary to their own wills, and in direct opposition to all the power of self defence, which they are capable of exerting, whether they are taken prisoners of war or stolen, or decoyed on ship board by the slave merchant, and then forcibly confined and carried off; it must be acknowledged, they are taken in a state of war, and considered by the captor as a prize: therefore, the only true title and description of property they can possibly bear, is prize goods.

Is not the produce of the slave's labor likewise prize goods?

It certainly is: for the man, who, by mere power and violence, without any just plea of right, not only holds them as slaves, but takes from them, in the same cruel and arbitrary manner, the proceeds of their labor, without their

consent, thereby places himself in a state of continual and actual war with his slaves. And, moreover, as the stealing or taking a man by violence, and depriving him of his liberty, and reducing him to the wretched and helpless state of a slave, is the highest grade of felony, and is done purposely to profit by the slave's labor; therefore, the produce of the slave's labor is the highest grade of prize goods, next to his person."

He also says in the same pamphlet:

"The slave dealer, the slaveholder, and the slave driver, are virtually the agents of the consumer, and may be considered as employed and hired by him, to procure the commodity. For, by holding out the temptation, he is the original cause, the first mover in the horrid process; and every distinction is done away by the moral maxim—'*That whatever we do by another, we do ourselves.*'"

Let it not be said that our exertions are too trifling to be of any service—but remember that the widow's mite received its blessing, and that however small an influence our abstinence may exert on the system, a conscience void of offence toward God and man will be our sufficient reward. Abstinence does, however, exert no trifling influence on the system; for it is an admitted rule that

the supply is regulated by the consumption; then in proportion as the use of free produce is substituted for that of slaves, will the demand for the former increase, while that for the latter will decrease in the same ratio. Thus by faithfully abstaining from slave produce, the difficulties of obtaining free produce will be encountered, and it will ultimately become the interest of the slaveholder to change the situation of his laborers from involuntary slaves, to voluntary free laborers.

It has been supposed that the number of members of the Society of Friends throughout the world may be about two hundred thousand, and according to the calculation that ten persons consume enough produce to employ one slave, this number would be sufficient to keep in their present degraded and helpless condition twenty thousand of our fellow beings. Hence the abstinence of Friends, only, would exert no inconsiderable influence in breaking the yokes, and letting the oppressed go free.

The consideration that we are contributing in any way to a system which cruelly rends the parental and matrimonial ties, which degrades the intellect of man, and exerts so baneful an influence on the morals of the oppressor, as well

as the oppressed, is one which ought to arouse the latent energies of our nature, and awaken those feelings of our minds which in many of us have been for a long time lying dormant, and lead us to active exertions in washing our hands from the pollution, and in pleading for the deliverance of this deeply injured people.

What though it be said that laws sanction slavery — laws sanction war, and require military duties from citizens, but Friends do not consider it less sinful because supported by equally sinful laws. They conscientiously refuse to give any support to this system, either by acting themselves or hiring others to do it for them. Let us do the same with regard to slavery, and refrain from any participation in the crime of enslaving our fellow men. While we decline holding them ourselves, let us also refuse to offer any inducement to the slaveholder to continue in the practice.

We have here briefly thrown out a few suggestions, which we again, in the same feeling in which we commenced, urge upon your serious consideration, desiring that they may lead some to a more correct view of the subject.

In carrying out our testimony against slavery in this particular, we shall be fulfilling the golden

rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

Signed by direction, and on behalf of a meeting of "The Association of Friends for Advocating the Cause of the Slave, and Improving the Condition of the Free People of Color," held in Philadelphia, Third mo. 21st, 1838.

CALEB CLOTHIER,
DANIEL L. MILLER, jr., } *Clerks.*

